
A family affair with music

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Baltimore-based classical musicians travel to China as family to partake in Summer Olympic music program

It's hard to find a family more musically gifted than the Borowskys.

They've been given a rock star reception in countless countries. International press has given them rave reviews.

It takes a while to realize when reading the glowing testimonials, however, that the music they're playing isn't the next big thing.

It's classical.

They've traveled the world, but the Borowsky family calls Baltimore home and all of them have some connections to Towson University.

Recently, they performed in China from April 1 to April 15 for a program called "Great Harmony: One World, One Dream, One Family."

The concert featured original music and arrangements of classical music from around the globe, from "Amazing Grace" to "Ode to Joy" to the Chinese folk song "Jasmine Flower."

The concerts were organized in Beijing and Tianjin to commemorate the run-up to the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

The family, called "American Virtuosi" by international press, consists of former Towson faculty member and author Charles Borowsky, cello professor Cecylia Barczyk-Borowsky, 2005 alumna and world-renowned pianist Elizabeth Borowsky, 15-year-old cellist Frances-Grace Borowsky, and Indiana University sophomore violinist Emmanuel Borowsky.

China was a bit of a culture shock for them. Cecylia explained that the country had changed greatly since her first visit there in 1984.

"I was shocked," she said. "Cities like Tianjin are a little like Manhattan but ten times the size. The architecture's just amazing. It is beautiful. Although there are modern skyscrapers...each building is very appealing, visually. I found it very different and fascinating, something I didn't expect."

The food also caught her off-guard.

"They served duck, and there was this rotating thing. These things just kept coming on plates. This one thing looked very interesting, so I ate it then," she said. "So the person next to me says, 'Oh, do you know that this is the head of the duck you are eating?' And I say, 'Yes, it has a beak, indeed!'"

The family came back with countless stories of their trip and many surprises and lessons learned from the people and culture of modern China.

"During these 15 days we were busy, very successful, and very happy, because we could share the most successful things from our society and our culture," Charles Borowsky said. "There was music from different nations including Chinese and American music and European, it was like a new wave of world music."

Elizabeth was surprised by how interested Chinese students were in classical music and the sort of attention they were given.

"They were incredibly enthusiastic," she said. "They were taking a lot of pictures during performances. They were probably recording us too."

After a lecture given by her father, Elizabeth recalled hearing a bootleg recording of their rehearsal played over the speakers.

"We walked in and we were like 'Wait, that's us, that was us from yesterday. How did they get that?'" she said. "They treated us like rock stars. We got lots of flowers, we had to sign lots of autographs, and they'd give us these plush animals, and take lots and lots of pictures."

Frances joked about missing two weeks of class for the trip. Their break between trips is going to be very short.

On Tuesday, the family (sans Frances until after exams) will fly to Germany to spend the summer as artists in residence. Charles Borowsky said he thinks that performances like theirs can help spread peace.

"Classical music properly performed speaks to people and helps meet their intellectual and intelligent needs," he said. "It's amazing how the world can change positively when there is some kind of cultural exchange and economic development."
